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No Poem

*oh I wish I lived in No Stops
cause there's always a train going there.*

— Steve Messina

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

Brian Falter

THE ROBBER arrived punctually.

Due to an extremely dense fog which had caused the city to become doubly shrouded since dusk, he had originally thought differently.

Rather his right knee had. Ever since 11 o'clock that morning it had been reminding its employer that this upcoming evening would not exactly be the most suitable one for conducting business. The knee advised an evening at home by a blazing fire, by which it could relax and its employer could finally begin to read John Buchan's masterpiece, "The Thirty-Nine Steps".

However two significant items being remembered had caused the robber to disregard his knee's advice. One was the fact that he had no booze with which he could truly relax. Secondly (and possibly more important) was the fact that this particular evening represented the robber's thirteenth anniversary as one who engaged in what the people of Westchester had longed termed a "nefarious occupation". Naturally a celebration was in order — and of course in the only manner fitting.

Now deciding between health and sentimentality had taken its toll in time, and time was an item in which this robber was extremely interested. Being a professional he demanded excellent preparation which really just constituted the fact that he should be at his destination at least 10 minutes before any meeting could take place. A little idiosyncrasy on his part that's all. Glancing at his watch

and going over times in his mind he quickly calculated that he had thirteen minutes to reach his destination; and on such a night he calculated that it would take fifteen.

He had solved the problem in seconds.

Snatching up all the necessary items for the little jaunt, he had raced out of his flat and fortunately had gotten a cab directly. Then knowing full well that there was no earthly force powerful enough to stop a cab from reaching the intended destination when there was an extra fiver at stake for the driver for every minute lopped off the fifteen the robber had accounted for, the robber had arrived punctually.

After disembarking he stood in front of the Metropolitan Opera House. For a few moments he glanced at the billboards outside the Met extolling the fabulous Caruso as _____ in Halvey's "La Juive"; and then he walked directly across the way.

It was the second half of November and the opera season had just gotten underway a few days earlier. Ever since he had arrived in Fun City fifteen years ago the opera season had been his favorite time of year. For the last twelve it had been his most enjoyable as well as most productive.

The robber, a cultured man, had been an intense enthusiast of the opera ever since his days at one of those New England Colleges originally founded for theological purposes. Since those days he had likewise held great contempt for those early departures of the opera — the

one who left before the final curtain call.

To the robber these early departers were also the ones who during the intermittent stages of coming and going either slept, snorted or belched with combinations possible of course. These early departers were the ones who entertained the notion that if they attended the opera regularly, their names would be engraved in the hallowed pages of the Social Register.

The robber had crossed paths many times with this kind. It seemed to him that whenever he attended his favorite pastime he invariably had ended up sitting next to one of these "Bores", or disgusting as he usually referred to them. For his first two opera seasons he had condoned them, but after that he had vowed to "get even". Ergo he had attended the opera (when in season) one night of the week and had engaged in his "nefarious occupation" another night.

When he had first begun these "meetings" with the "opera buffs" thirteen years ago he knew that they would have to be conducted in the same professional manner as he had conducted his burglaries the previous two years in New York and another two years earlier in Boston. Any professional criminal would have told a budding figure of the "underworld" that in order to be successful one couldn't be a Wall Street executive in the daytime and then freelance in the clandestine at night. That was the way of amateurs who bungled around and ended up being caught. Professionalism was why he had never been caught; he had remembered the lessons his "professor" had taught him in Boston. Strictly professional — the opposite of the amateurish policeman.

For this reason, the robber had watched the officer on the beat — O'Halloran by name — for the past twelve years peering into dark corners and alleyways looking for some remnant from Hell's Kitchen with a mask and three days growth on his face. Tonight was no different, there was the officer down the street just a ways looking into the dark corners and alleyways. The robber laughed to himself between puffs on a pipe he had just filled. Leaning against a public leaning post he chuckled a bit more. Oh what did it matter he finally thought — he's the son of a police captain, he's got a steady job.

Turning his attention to the business side the robber remarked with a tinge of

bitterness increasing in the tone of his voice, "They'll be out shortly . . . won't even stay for the curtain call — no they'll have to rush home and tell their families what a great opera "La Juive" is and what a marvelous voice Caruso has.

A few minutes later it happened. One of the Met's doors swung open and out of the pale yellow glow of its anteroom walked a man whom the fog made a mere shadow. The shadow turned left sharply and hurriedly. It was clear to the robber that this was the one he wanted. The taxis which usually waited outside the Met were just beginning to get into place for the Met's patrons but it was obvious to the robber that the shadow was not going to take one. The robber did the same as the shadow had done and promptly fell to the ground.

"Damn knee, damn fog!" he cursed. Getting up quickly he still was able to see the shadow due to the glow of the street lamps. For a few minutes both walked on opposite sides with the robber — albeit painfully — finally becoming parallel with the shadow across the street when his knee buckled under again. He cursed again afraid that he had lost his "pigeon" when he glanced up and saw the shadow coming towards him. "What a stroke of luck!" he exclaimed to himself.

"Can I help you?" asked the shadow whose face was not at all visible due to a rather wide-brimmed hat.

"No thank you," replied the robber slowly picking himself up. "It's just this damn rheumatism and damn fog!"

"You're alright, aren't you?"

"Yes, yes I'm fine."

"Shouldn't be out on a night like this — bad for your health — you better go home and get some rest," the shadow advised.

"I guess you're right . . . well thank you for help," replied the robber.

"Whatever for?" asked the shadow, "I didn't do anything." . . . "well good night." The shadow turned to go.

The robber pulled out a .38 which henceforth had been in the right hand pocket of his overcoat. "Don't move," he said casually to the shadow who had just offered him assistance, ". . . now put your hands up and be quick about it . . . now turn around slowly." The robber did this to note the expression of the face fully but this time there was no face.

"What's this . . . what's the meaning of this?" asked the shadow as if trying to restore some lost dignity.

"It's a hold-up," remarked the robber, ". . . and if you don't like playing Russian Roulette with six bullets you'll do as you are told."

The shadow suddenly became calm and remarked just as coolly, "Very well Mr. Clougher, I can see very clearly that your version is not abettor's game."

"What's that supposed to mean?" demanded the robber.

"Come now Mr. Clougher you haven't forgotten your name have you? . . . why on earth should you? I am the only one who knows who you are — and what can you do about it — kill me? Hardly. I know your game Mr. Clougher and professional robbers don't kill — it's simply against all ethics. Russian roulette — come now."

Clougher was a little disturbed but remained silent.

"So this is your thirteenth year starting tonight — surprised? . . . well you shouldn't be actually. I've followed your career from as a robber for the past twelve years — extraordinary I must say — all those unaccounted for robberies around the Met and goodness knows how many more . . . well at least I'm sure of the ones in the Met area — you Mr. Clougher — oh you made it too easy and if the police hadn't been so inept . . ."

The last remark stung Clougher's professional pride but he still remained quiet.

"Well if you're going to rob me, can I at least get some enjoyment out of it by having a smoke?" asked the shadow.

"Of course," replied Clougher whose tone betrayed the fact that he wanted to get a good look at the shadow which seemed to know him so well.

"Mr. Clougher have you forgotten your old professor?" The lighted match showed the face of a man of about sixty, silver-haired and moustached with silvered specs.

"Professor!" exclaimed Clougher thoroughly relieved.

"Yes," he replied. "It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

"Yes, yes," answered the former student. "You had me worried there for a minute."

"I thought so too — seemed to have forgotten one of the basics — poise . . .

what the hell did you stand there listening to me like a deaf mute or something — speak up — show your poise."

"Haven't changed, have you," laughed Clougher.

"I've tried not to," retorted the professor.

They both laughed.

"Well what are you up to now?"

"Me? Why I'm in politics — yes sir, got a real nice job downtown — don't do much mind you, but I get along — couldn't do second-story work all my life now could I?"

They laughed again.

"Yessir" the professor continued, "when I came to New York thirteen years ago I got in with the right people real quick — paid off real nice I'd say."

"That's great . . ." acknowledged Clougher who was about to add something more when his knee buckled under a third time. He cursed again picked himself up and asked, "Professor might you have a second fifth at your place?"

"Well it's your own fault for coming out on a night like this and you wouldn't be asking for booze. Besides I'm respectable now and it's Prohibition or have you forgotten?"

They laughed another time.

"C'mon professor — you must have something — you know there's nothing like that second fifth to lift a guy."

"Boy do I know," reminisced the professor, ". . . I'll tell you what — lemme see your piece and I'll see you get a snootful."

"My piece?" asked Clougher.

"Yes — been a long time since I had a real piece in my hands — sort of brings back the old days — know what I mean?"

"Sure, sure," answered the young man who paused as he was about to relinquish the gun, ". . . you aren't going to rob me are you?"

"No, no, whatever gave you that idea."

"Okay." Clougher handed over the gun. "It's in good condition — never used it but keep it in good condition — remember that much from you anyways," he laughed.

"Yes it is," remarked the professor about the gun. "Sure brings back memories . . . sure has been a long time since we've seen each other."

"Sure has," replied Clougher.

"You know we should see a lot more of each other," proclaimed the professor.

"You're absolutely right," assented Clougher.

"Yessir been an awful long time."

"Too long."

"We should see a lot more of each other—agree?" asked the professor.

"Certainly."

"Good, good, maybe you can come over for dinner one night—you must remember Emmy."

"Why sure I do," shouted Clougher . . . "Must be full grown by now."

"Married," said the professor as matter of factly as possible.

"No," replied Clougher a bit shocked.

"Yes, married to a real nice fella too—why I think you might know him."

"Really?"

"Yes—you must know my son-in-law Officer O'Halloran," remarked the professor smoothly as he leveled the barrel at Clougher. . . . ". . . Sorry old boy . . . it was an election promise . . . shall we go?"

To The Wrath of the World

*Trembling through a dark, cold night,
I was scurrying back, back, back,
into my dark, damp den,
which I call my home, shelter, asylum, PRISON.*

*I had arrived, yet I was
as far as I could be.
My home was gone.
My rathole dried up*

*Suddenly I was jumping about
in a frenzy, realizing I was free,
Chanting tunes of my youth,
the song of my parents, of myself.*

*But I felt heavier, slower,
I felt dead.*

*Not my body, nor my soul,
but just a feeling I had.
I knew my chains were cast off,
but they grew stronger.*

*I walked, crawled off, away, far away,
disappearing slowly, too slowly,
Now surely I have fallen prey
to the wrath of the world.*

— Michael J. Norton

Lost

*Striving to understand the lives
Of others and self,
Man has lost his inner feelings
From within himself.
History records figure and fact,
Yet within the man,
History has no contact.
How then may one be judged,
One in history, one begrimed?*

— James Roode

Expiration?

*Looking through the greyish, rain stained window
... and I wonder, is it just I?
Am I the culprit of this feeling?*

*I feel myself slowly being pressed into the pages
of a book like the first rose petals
Once Blooming.
Now Fading.*

*Black and White are the colors of my mind.
... and the little man smiles while
closing the book he smiles as I am
crushed between the pages I try to
scream but only a prayer is heard ...*

A prayer of what might have been, a prayer for me.

— Joe Fiore

*Longing to grasp
The railing of light,
So as not to falter
In the daylight's night
Walking on wind,
So as not to tire,
As if the measuring of life
Were about to expire.*

— Thomas Romanus

Questionnaire

*riddle me —
w/ reasons after fact;
quiz me —
you know i'll answer back.
tell me —
if the things you think are true —
ask me —
if i'm still in love w/ you*

— mkg 4/3/74

*There are those certain times
When one has to trust another.
Uncertainty should have no place.
If so, one feels the pain
Of not knowing and second guessing.*

*These last few weeks
The pains of Uncertainty
Had held dominion o'er my mind.
Worrying at my standing
And of other, not of my kind.*

*The other had held a deciding hand
Controlling another's destiny —
Or to the point where it seemed
That another would never venture
Again and have faith in men.*

*But recently knowledge, cold as winter
Exposed and developed other's picture;
Abounding in selfish immaturity.
Other had played his hand unwisely.
Losing, with low card and underhanded means.*

*There are those certain times
When one has to trust another.
Uncertainty should have no place
The Love and Sincerity within me
Has let Uncertainty have no place.*

— James M. Mitchell, Jr.

MIRROR

Michael Folino

CHUCKY ran into his bedroom and closed the door behind him. Groping under his mattress, Chucky's small hands closed around a flat, smooth object. It was a mirror.

An antique, with light blue streaks of iron and imperfections in the glass; a Victorian lady's handmirror, oval, with an elaborate brass frame and handle.

Kneeling on the floor, Chucky peered intently into the mirror. His face, reflected in the glass, was streaked with dirt; his sun-bleached-white hair matted with sweat. His breath misted a small part of the mirror.

In his mind's eye, Chucky could see another face. He projected it onto the glass.

Chucky did not notice his mother's coming into the room. She stepped over the threshold and quickly back, gasping for air. A stink pervaded the air in Chucky's room, but went no farther than the doorway, the hall smelled fresh and clean.

"... He just knelt there, didn't hear me, and must not have smelled it." Birkin grimaced as his wife, Julia, described the smell in their son's room. "I grabbed a handkerchief and went back in. The windows were open and it wasn't coming from the outside. Chucky didn't pay me any attention, kneeling there like that. And that stink! It smelled like... like..." she grabbed for words in the air.

"Burned flesh," Birkin whispered. It was an unpleasant memory.

When Birkin was a boy, he had had a twin brother with destructive tendencies. Having been locked up twice for a total of three years, the boy, Gerald, had been recently released from the county asylum.

Birkin's mother had come home a week before Gerald's arrival with a baby girl, and placed her in the boys' old nursery, now painted pink and decorated with stuffed animals and new toys. "Ella." was what Birkin said when he first laid eyes on the baby, and so the girl was named.

Gerald was introduced to Ella, and watched as his mother fondled and cooed at the baby, unaware that he still stood

at the foot of the crib. Quietly, Gerald strode out of the room.

Birkin awoke that night to his brother's quiet laughter outside their room. Then he heard it.

From the nursery came the screams of his mother and sister, mingled in terror and pain. Birkin jumped out of bed and ran through the dark to the nursery doorway. He turned to look at Gerald and saw the box of matches used to light the stove in his hand. Then he peered inside.



Birkin's mother screamed and cried. She was on the floor with her daughter in her arms. She had put the fire out by rolling the baby's body against her own, but it was too late.

The stench of kerosene and burned bed-clothing rose from the crib. A new stink was becoming noticeable now, however. Birkin blocked his nose and closed his eyes. The baby lay dead in his mother's arms, the skin and flesh underneath burned away and the stink that rose from the tiny body was so bad that Birkin sank to his knees and vomited until his stomach muscles ached and his eyes smarted.

Birkin's mother quieted down; she stared at her burned daughter, then glanced up at Gerald. She picked herself up from the floor, her body was cut and burned. Silently she staggered toward Gerald; the baby lay dead on the floor.

Her voice was hoarse, it barely rose above a whisper.

"Birkin, get your father. Tell him to get the car out of the garage."

"Why?" Birkin asked. Gerald was silent now, glaring at his mother and brother.

No answer. Suddenly she swirled on Gerald, grabbed him by the throat and banged his head against the wall.

There was no other movement; Birkin stood still, shocked. His father was at the door now, just awakened by the noise.

Five, six times, Gerald's head thudded against the wall, a small, bright red spot appeared on it. Then she stopped, suddenly looked back at her dead daughter, and wept.

Birkin's father brought him back to bed.

Lying awake that night, Birkin heard the car come and go in the driveway below his window, and his mother mourned the loss of her daughter in the kitchen below his room.

Gerald was gone by morning, no mention was ever made of his whereabouts again. The funeral of Birkin's sister took place the following day.

"Burned flesh," Birkin repeated, and went upstairs to see his son.

Chucky was kneeling on his bed, holding a model airplane and making exhaust noises and diving screams. "Hey, Chucky," his father called out in greeting.

Chucky didn't reply, his father saw the handle of the mirror sticking out from under the bed. Birkin picked it up.

"Where did you get this, Chucky?" asked his father.

"From Grandma." Birkin winced at his son's answer. All of Chucky's grandparents died when Chucky's mother was seven months pregnant; all four within eight days of each other. Birkin's parents in a car accident; Julia's died in a fire. So grief-stricken was Julia, that she went into labor during her parents' funeral and had to be rushed to the hospital before the services were over.

Chucky sensed the events surrounding his birth at the age of five, but in a strange way. The boy first evidenced his awareness of the deaths after a visit to the graves of Birkin's parents: until then

no real discussion had taken place about any of Chucky's grandparents. Birkin was still troubled by the incident. . . .

"When is Grandma coming to visit again?" the boy asked in the car on the way home from the cemetery.

The imaginary Grandma could have been one of Chucky's fantasy playmates; Birkin had counted and could recognize three separate and very distinct characters, plus several different ones that came and went quickly.

The first was an animal playmate: Chucky was two, he gave no name or sex or even type to it. The "friend" was the dog or cat that Chucky could never have because of an allergic reaction to animal hairs.

The third and fourth came together. Chucky was almost six years old, exploring and being destructive around the house. These playmates were a ploy. Chucky had often blamed the damage on one or the other.

One afternoon, Julia was sitting in the kitchen, talking with a friend. Chucky, now almost six, was napping in his room, when the sound of breaking glass and the crash of a fallen something below Chucky's bedroom window was heard by the women.

Julia jumped up, her face drained of color, and rushed to Chucky's room. Her son lay there, still curled up with his toy giraffe, just as his mother had left him an hour before. Asleep. The mirror that hung over the bureau was missing, Julia saw it smashed when she looked down at the walkway below the window.

"Chucky," she whispered softly. The boy was asleep. Julia tickled the bottom of his foot: there was no reaction. Her friend, Rita, stood at the door.

"The big mirror?" asked Rita. Julia nodded. "When you moved in here, it took both your husband and mine to get it up the stairs and on the wall."

"No, that's the mirror in our bedroom. This one was pretty light but he couldn't have lifted it without a lot of trouble." Julia look at her sleeping son. "He's asleep, though, isn't he, Rita?" Julia asked as if she wanted a negative reply. The boy was obviously asleep.

Rita didn't reply. That was four years ago.

The night after the smell incident in his room, Julia was awakened by Chucky, whispering angrily at someone. Then an-

swering. The boy was carrying on his own conversation, too muffled for Julia to hear.

She concentrated more closely. Chucky had a light chiming voice. The other voice was little different. It was Chucky's it was the voice of a boy his age; but not exactly Chucky. The voices stopped. Julia closed her eyes and shuddered.

Then she remembered the mirror. Where had she seen it before?

Julia rose without waking Birkin and tiptoed to Chucky's room. The light shone under the door.

Julia bent down and peered into the keyhole. The air was stifling in the hallway, Julia was sweating with every exertion.

The bedclothes were thrown on the floor. Chucky, dressed in underpants and undershirt, was kneeling on the bed, his back facing the door. He held the mirror at arm's length, Julia could see the boy's reflection. It was to haunt her memories like ghost stories did when Julia was a child.

Chucky was smiling. His nose and lips were covered with blood, the blood was dripping slowly down his front. The boy's normally blue eyes were staring at their reflection. But now they were unclear, as if they were filled with a cloudy fluid like a vulture's eyes. Chucky's eyes were watery and ugly; his face turned his mother's stomach.

Slowly, the vulture eyes turned from the reflection, towards the door, they focused on the keyhole. Chucky knew Julia was there; although there was no way of knowing it. Julia was immobilized.

Cat-like, Chucky suddenly leaped around, on all fours, snarling, staring directly at the key-hole in the door. Then she heard Birkin's voice.

"Julia, come back." Julia turned from the keyhole. Her husband stood at their bedroom doorway, a tear brimming in his eye. She got up and ran to him, embraced him; he whirled her away from the door.

Chucky's light went off, they heard no noise.

Julia stared into her husband's face. "You know?"

Birkin nodded. "Oh, God. It happens every night. When he opens his eyes in the morning, they're like that sometimes, for just a second, and then it goes away."

"What about the mirror? Where did he

get it?" Julia had tears streaming down her face, her voice broke with fear for her child and for herself. Her stomach was knotted and sick.

"I don't know. How come we never found it? When you change his sheets, it's never there. I even searched his room for it last Sunday, top to bottom, Julia. He had no idea I'd go in there, yet that mirror wasn't there."

Julia spoke slowly, her voice cracked. "What about his eyes?"

"Dead eyes." Birkin's voice was barely audible. "Like the eyes of a dead dog. There's something behind them, though, that isn't a ten year old boy."

"He's my own son, and I'm afraid of him. I want to get out of here now. I'm scared of what's in there."

Birkin shook his head. "I don't know what to do for him. God, I wish I knew. C'mon, there's nothing we can do right now."

They went back to bed, and waited for the dawn in silence.

Chucky was normal at breakfast, no mention was made of the night before. Julia noticed no bloodstains on either his T-shirt or bed. The mirror was not to be found.

Then Julia saw it. Opening the closet, she noticed a tail under a fallen pair of pants. She recognized it.

"Chucky," she screamed, raging into the kitchen where the boy sat. She grabbed him by the hair, wrenching him out of the chair, and brought him into his bedroom. "That's Hannah, you bastard." She hit him across the face.

Hannah was Julia's thirteen year old cat. An expensive Siamese, a wedding present from her mother. Julia had kept it in the house; a week before, when she could not find the cat, she thought that it had escaped out a door carelessly left open.

"You killed it! What's wrong with you?" She hit him again. Actually, that cat was her only private possession, one she had guarded vehemently. The cat was more Julia's than Chucky was, she had to share her son with his father.

Now Julia hit him on the side of the head. She began to cry.

"Why, you bastard? I loved that cat more than . . ." she hit the boy again, her nails clawed his cheek. "Get out, you son of a bitch, before I kill you!" she screamed. Chucky jetted out the door and outside the house.

Julia made her way to the phone and dialed Birkin's office number.

"Good morning, Mr. Field's office." It was Sarah, Birkin's secretary.

"Sarah, it's Julia. Let me speak to Birk, will you?"

"Oh, Julia, I'm sorry, he's interviewing . . ."

Julia lost her temper and flared. "I don't care, I want to talk to my husband, goddammit, put him on the phone."

Julia heard the phone ring again. "Hello?" It was Birkin.

"He killed Hannah," Julia cried. "My cat was on the bottom of the closet. It smelled, she must have been in there for four days. He killed her, Birk. Can you come home?"

"Oh, baby, I'm sorry. I really can't get out of here 'til six tonight. You know how Thursdays are. Is it really that important that I come home now?"

Julia had calmed down. "No, I'm sorry I bothered you. I'm stupid. Goodbye, Birk."

"I'll come home as soon as I can. Goodbye, baby. Take care." She heard a click.

Rita came by a few minutes later. "I heard screaming. What's wrong?"

Julia broke into tears again. "It's Hannah, Chucky killed her. I'll kill him, too. Goddamn ungrateful . . ." Sobs began to wrack her body, she sank into Rita's consoling arms.

Rita sat her down on a kitchen chair and walked to Chucky's room. Going over to the closet, she picked up the pants that covered the cat's body. She choked at what she saw.

Chucky had disemboweled the cat. There was a great slit down the furry stomach, the guts of the animal were sprawled and smeared over a handmirror; its handle was all that was left untouched by the blood.

Rita ran to the bathroom. Bending over the toilet, she vomited and threw up as if it could make her forget what she had seen.

"What's wrong?" Julia was at the threshold of the bathroom. Her voice was still tremulous and strained. "The cat? . . . oh, no."

Rita began to rise, but not fast enough to stop her friend from reaching the closet. Julia wailed. Then she remembered the blood on her son's face. "Oh, no," she murmured. Then Julia noticed the mirror.

Lifting it slowly, Julia picked off the

cat's insides from the glass. Taking it over to the edge of the bureau, Julia smashed the glass, as hard as she could until it was all gone from the mirror frame. Then she raised the brass frame and flung it out through the closed window.

Rita was crying now. Julia took her and laid her down on the sofa, and walked back to the kitchen. Sitting at the table, she waited.

It was getting dark when Chucky came home. He opened the door slowly and peered inside.

Julia sat at the table. "Come in," she said evenly.

Chucky stepped inside. He was filthy, his shirt and shorts were torn; there were briars in his dirty hair and his face was shiny with droplets of sweat.

"Go take a bath."

Chucky obediently marched off to the bathroom and began running the water. Julia waited.

The loud splashes of water on water stopped. Julia rose and walked to the bathroom and flicked on the light. Chucky stood there, naked, holding the mirror frame.

"You broke it," he said. Walking over, he closed the door and turned to his mother. "You broke it."

Chucky snarled, and raising the frame quickly, struck across the face. Tears sprung to Julia's eyes.

Swiftly, the boy began beating her on the face and breasts with the heavy mirror. Julia held her arms out to catch his, but could not. She fell before him, Chucky kept beating her with the frame.

Julia was lying on the bathroom floor, almost unconscious, her face was bloody and bruised. Her son was standing over her, the brazen frame raised high, stained with the blood of the cat and wet with Julia's blood. He was ready to strike her again. Julia quickly raised her knee and caught Chucky in the groin.

Chucky collapsed, unable to breathe. Julia kicked him again, and Chucky dropped the frame, holding himself in pain.

Fumbling blindly, Julia found the frame and took hold of it. Three firm strokes; it was over. She had caved in her son's skull; the blood was everywhere. Julia looked down at her son, small and naked, his head split wide open.

And his eyes. The vulture eyes were back, staring at her, lifeless now, but knowing her, even in death.

The Mysterious Love

*You are familiar, but such a stranger
I know You in heart, but not in sight
You are a glorious sign of the light
But my young, confused mind is in danger.
I want to know You, but my mind lingers
As I solemnly dream of You at night.
"Who are You who loves all black and all white?"
You, Almighty, are sanity's ranger.
I long to see Your face, but I'm afraid.
Yes, I'm afraid of my own Creator!
Only You know how brave I try to be.
I, as a sorry sinner, need Your help.
Help that only You can provide for me.
Words cannot express our wondrous love.*

— Carolyn DePascale



NIGHT WALK

Daniel McGrath

IT WAS silent and cold. The streetlights flickered on and off. It was as though the world had changed before his eyes. His moonlit shadow was sallow and the surrounding buildings were of ghastly form. Encaged in his mind and in the pentagon of apartments, he strode silently. It was just like in the movies he thought, an undefinable destiny. Just a night walk? No ordinary one he thought to himself. His thoughts and actions had never been so outcast from the night. I must be in a trance he said softly, I am cold but not weary. At that, his knees began to shiver, and he lit a paper bag on fire with a match for temporary warmth. While walking through a puddle the water spurted from underneath his sneaker and he said that he was the water and his body was the night. He was pressured and felt like he was being stepped on. He walked further into the dazzling maze of apartments. He grew tremulous, he had never

been this way before, but this night was different. Why? He had finished his homework and was still nervous from the day's pressure on him. He turned and looked toward Harvard Stadium. It was past midnight and all that could be heard was the trash paper furiously blowing in the air. He saw that the stadium's vines were shivering and cracking like a cold animal. Indeed that animal was himself. He couldn't move, his body was so numb. "I can't take it any longer, the air is like a knife cutting through my legs, and the cold is too intense for my hands," he said aloud. "I must escape." Back through the maze of dark grey apartments he ran. His legs carried him like the wings of a bird to his front door . . . Just as he opened it, every light in the project shut off! He was saved, and the mysterious hour of the night had passed. It was one in the morning, and he was home!

Raging, fearless, pretentious cluster of actors

Lower me with their raised hands

Into the depths of reality,

Where I don't try to climb out.

God, it's dark in my depression, or

Is it their tinted personalities,

Parading in somber shrouds of white.

Can they live like me?

When the play stops — dead?

Do they wash out the red mascara?

Is the facade such a solid shield?

Does it cure obesity, or perhaps the

"Heartbreak" of psor . . . ?

They will be damn . . . Are

You kidding?!!

The flats may fall, but the curtain still has a

Slash of my wrist in it.

A chip of my mit has stopped my choking

Until I drink another glass of water.

The silence of chattering mixes

With the pollution around me.

Looking straight ahead, paralyzed, I

Read: "Billy Loves Joanne", and next to it:

"Pull this lever if YOU WANT TO KILL YOURSELF . . .

NO!!!NOOOOOOOO!!

It doesn't say that.

I just HOPED so.

Better luck(?) next time.

My smokestack won't open.

Swirling bodies thrown together

Move slowly around

To the distant twangings of broken fingernails.

It's my turn.

It's her turn.

It is my turn to . . .

They are laughing.

I am shaking.

I am going to ask her . . .

But I know I won't.

Anyway the punch was good.

So were the insults of the brilliant mannequins,

Who dance while I —

Tie my shoelaces together and walk away.

— Manny Noe

THE BUM

LOOK AT HIM, isn't it a shame?" said Mrs. Brown. She was looking out the window at a figure standing there. "He was a very bright boy as a child, he must still be just as smart as he was before. What a waste!"

AH! A new topic to gossip about had just arisen for the four elderly ladies who were rapidly becoming tired of playing cards, and they were determined to make the most of it.

"Do you know what?" began Mrs. Otto. The other three heads bent a little closer. "His mother always told me that he was going to be the one in the family who would make it big. She's not very good at making predictions, is she?" At this, a slight titter of laughter went around the table.

"Seriously, though, it must really hurt his parents to see him like this. He looks like a real bum, the way he dresses. I would never have let my son drop out of school and go around like a slob. George wouldn't have stood for it, either. George would have said 'James, when you go out of this house, you are wearing my name on your back. If you want to live and look like a bum, then get out of my house and out of my life.' And George would have been perfectly right to say it."

With that, Mrs. Stanfield settled back in her chair with a look which almost dared anybody to question her husband's words. But none came, only approving nods. Of course he would be right, George Stanfield had been a big man in politics before his retirement, he knew what was going on in the world.

The conversation lapsed into silence as the four ladies stared out the window at the young man. His hair was long and curly, and his dirty army jacket went perfectly with his dirty dungarees. Even though none of the ladies could see very well without glasses, it appeared that his face was gaunt and pale. As they watched, he pulled a dirty piece of paper and a broken piece of a pencil from his pocket, sat on the curbstone and began to write. He sat for quite a while, sometimes writing, sometimes chewing the pencil, deep in thought. All the while, the ladies watched him, wondering what he could be doing.

Brian Carroll

Suddenly, he stood up. He read the paper over once, smiled, then bent over and placed it under a rock, where it could not be blown away by the cold winter wind. He pulled what seemed to be a small knife from his pocket, closed his eyes and quickly buried the knife all the way to the handle in his wrist. He pulled it out, looking at the blood spurting from his wrist, then slashed the other wrist. Within seconds, the look of pain which had contorted his face, changed to one of extreme peace and contentment and he sank to the ground, a weak smile on his face. There he lay near the paper.

Mrs. Brown was the first to recover from the shock of the scene they had just witnessed and jumped to her feet. "Call the police! Call an ambulance!" she shrieked. Mrs. Otto jumped up, and went quickly to the phone. The police were on the scene within minutes. In the confusion, the rock which had been on the paper was kicked away and the paper floated down the street.

But their efforts were futile. The boy was dead before they even arrived. While the four ladies looked on, they placed the body in the ambulance and with siren wailing, headed toward the city morgue.

Later that day, as George Stanfield was on his way home from the local pub, where he had been coaching a young hopeful politician on ways to deal with people, he saw a piece of paper lying on the sidewalk. Being an advocate of ecology, he picked it up, and also, being rather curious, began to read it. He was just about at his steps when he gave a chuckle and said, "That kid! For a worthless bum he sure has a sense of humor. Imagine him committing suicide! Never!" Just then he noticed the blood on his sidewalk. He clucked, saying to himself, "Some animal must have gotten hit by a car. Guess I'll have to get out the hose."

As he walked up the steps, he threw the paper into the barrel, where it lay face up. And it read:

THE LAST WILL AND TESTIMONY
OF FREDDY LORRACK

'I, Freddy Lorrack, being of sound body, mind and soul, sit here on the last day of my life, deep in thought. I have been on this earth for seventeen years, and other than the priceless items of personal value which are locked in my mind, I have nothing. Thus, I cannot leave anything

to you. For if I was to give you the treasures of my memory and the happiness of my being, I know you would reject them again, as you did when I was alive. So all I can leave you is my thanks for having tried to raise me properly, and my apologies for not living up to your ideals. I shall leave now, knowing that I am no longer your burden.'

I

*In mari pereo, sed vivo.
Contra undas fluctuosas contendeo;
Inter molem aequosum minantem sum,
Tamen lucem video.
Per furvam caligonem vehor.
Extendo bracchios succurentemque
Vim tango. Non immergam!
Neque sine propositione fluitare
Limine desperationis continuabo.
Fulgor apparuit.
Mihi centum soles milleque faces prodiunt,
Quamquam in obscuritatem iactus.
Teneo destinationem.
Teneo spem.*

II

*Est locus occultus praeteritorum
Quo memoriae refugiunt
Cum animus sollicitatur.

Fortasse vel desidia,
Imagine somniove,
Fortasse admonitione beatorum dierum,
Non cogitationes illius loci obliviscor.

Quo vita prodiebat voluptates assiduas;
Quo labores nugae erant:

Sed iamdum abitum.*

*Id quaero,
Et interdum credo inveniri,
Et imaginem vocis diu obscurae audio;
Et gaudii ventos calidos sentio;
Et opto ut possim ibi manere

At quaeque commoratio fit rarer,
Quaeque brevior.*

I

*I am dying in the sea, yet I live.
I am struggling against billowy waves;
I am amidst a threatening wet mass,
But still, I see a light.
I am carried through a dense mist.
Extending my arms I feel an aiding force.
I shall not drown!
Nor shall I continue to float in the threshold
Of despair without purpose.
A light has appeared.
One hundred suns and a thousand
Torches have come forth to me,
Thrown into darkness,
I have a destination
I have hope.*

II

*The enchanted place of your past
Where your memories flee
When your mind is vexed.*

*Or in idleness,
Perhaps as a fantasy or a dream,
Perhaps as a reminder of happier days,
You remember this place.*

*Where living meant incessant joys,
Where troubles were trifles . . .*

But it has since disappeared

*You search for it,
And sometimes you believe you have found it,
And you hear echoes of sounds long ago forgotten
And you feel the warm breeze of delight,
And you hope to remain there.*

*But each visit becomes rarer
And each visit becomes shorter.*

— Anonymous





Abstract of Us

(Dedicated to b y and r g,
good friends in whose spirits this was written.)

a couple.
unit of two
or pair of one
different names for the same thing.

I watch all the couples
melt into one
or maybe a few . . .

I.

boy talk girl
on a subway train
for a pillow he has a radio

(his only love
because it asks for nothing in return)

and he takes a bow.

does he really think she's applauding him
because he knows all the words to "You're So Vain"
and "Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight"?
has he ever seen her?
does he ever want to?
will he ever have to?
and who's to say

II.

Running the lives of the people around you
Has to be a loving thing to do
Forcing your ways to be imitated
The right thing to do.
There's a girl and you know that everything she is
Works around everything you
She's happy to serve you but where's her tip
Working for scale for you

Did you lay her?
Did you walk away?
Did you leave her wondering where she'd been that day?
Did you see her smile?
Didn't you think she'd want to?
I hope that she won't die without you

Questioning love on occasion —
Little else better to do
There's all kinds of definitions
But what applies to you?

It's easy to follow you
It's what she's expected to do
As a woman in a little boys' world.

Do you have her just as someone to whom
you attribute applause inside your head?
Why do you look so much alike?

(comb your hair in
her face like a mirror
maybe she'll love it
she has to
according to you.)

III.

... reality on occasion
a grain of truth over there
problems and sympathy
not all that hard to care when she falls
he is there
though he knows the falls aren't always real
he doesn't mind
because he needs someone to say "Thank you
I might have hurt myself without you
and I'd do the same for you"
so he fakes a fall
and she sees through and laughs but helps him on his feet
they've been falling all their lives for lovers since their mothers
it's deceptive but I think it's not half bad

IV.

Temporary dancefloor couples

couple nights at most
degenerate into single nights
as they get old
marriages of convenience
marriages more of need
no preacher but the customs
tell where they should be

V.

hayride sleighride
fun for all
must show your friends the magic that you've learned
too much —
what better way to feel but do not touch
it's a breeze
1930's
Hollywood movies
on TV
watch the couple in the back
they're good at what they're doing
maybe they'll break the record set in 1963
too bad it's not in Guinness/I know it should be
or what good will it be?

VI.

now he's away from her how does she feel
(to be alone or to be alive?
a question she's never asked before,
but she likes the sound of it.)

she is a storybook Cinderella, and knows it,
but must deny it to friends.
she wants to hear somebody else say it
and he never does

wondering if that skin of hers
shielded by him so long from the sun
would burn (or would she like the idea?)
no definite answers.

*curious if she can see
without him telling her to
suffragette of the human race
for a while at least*

*wondering what she'll do when he gets back
probably the same as before
raising herself to his level
while he's raising himself to hers*

VII.

*no wonder they feel I'm beneath them
I am their go-between*

*I carry their messages (which can only be face to face)
I guess they need me
for their fool
Shakespearean fool*

*watching the prince and princess
who have all the long-remembered lines
for an endless audience*

she uses me to lean on

*he can't be there all the time, and her
without a man . . .*

*how could she face her friends?
and he fans himself with me
all for his flattery*

*to think, someone wants what he has
feeding his needs*

and mine too

*I laugh at their games but I must say
I'd play in a minute if I got the chance
what chance . . .*

VIII.

*everyone's someone to lean on
jealous/no love to fear
everyone's someone protects
leaving no stone unshielded
everyone's someone who keeps alive
traditions handed on
man and woman
afraid to define themselves to themselves
assembly-line products that all are made
to interlock
line up and choose the same mold
as your friends*

*so what is the fear with all people reduced
to male and female dovetail joints?*

yet you still fear the square peg in the round hole

*may be you
be you
be you*

could you?

*gray is a color with which nothing clashes
but the only gray lovers are in museums
quite in comfort but marble hard
can't you receive the message?*

*look at yourself your gray paint is peeling
it can't stay on forever
find yourself a blend that's forever
won't you try?
afraid to define yourselves to yourselves
you live
and die
and only
live
and die.
won't you try?*

won't you try . . .

IX.

*what a frightening sight to see my face
to see my face distorted
in a passing windowpane
which has no more concern for me
than all the hundreds millions people
who neither know nor care
that I am not in love . . .*

*Shakespearean fool and go-between
different names for the same . . .*

*me
chronicler and lonely man . . .*

*me
dancefloors or deception
control or narcissism*

*maybe they're just as lonely as I
so I'd like to believe*

*I'd play in a minute if I got the chance
I'd play in a minute if it was the chance —
no definite answers*

*I'm dying writing of dead people
show me someone who's alive
who knows how to stay alive
a live
a love?*

*doesn't make you alive
not on the dancefloors
(or is that love?)
not in the games —*

but I'm sick of talking of games . . .

*and I almost envy the eunuchs who don't have to play the games
and I almost wish I were a child again, but the pain was pretty much the same
and I wonder whom I can ask about the womb . . .*

X.

*and during a recent second a baby is born
and they call it a love child, but they call it a bastard too
if the truth be known, the truth is somewhere in the middle
it always is.
it always seems to be
seems to be . . .*

— Steve Messina

THE LEGEND OF RANDY JAMESON (1949-1961)

Eric Caplan



HAYWOOD was a small town in central Kansas. It had all the physical features of a fair-sized city of 10,000 people — bowling lanes, several factories, about ten modern public schools, a civic auditorium, its own Combat zone, a shopping district of thirty department stores and novelty shops, even a zoo. Haywood never flourished, however. It just never was able to attract enough people to become much of anything. Due to its lack of population, Haywood still retained much of the flavor of a rural retreat in the middle of nowhere. It was somewhat scenic — a few small hills, a beautiful clear lake set amidst expansive fields of tall amber grass, and just outside the town, a peaceful wilderness, except for the abandoned railroad station and the seemingly endless rust-ridden tracks which led back in the minds of the older citizens to a better day. Most said Haywood was just suffering from a case of the doldrums; it was stale from a deficiency in activity. Others thought Haywood was merely a hard luck town, never to have been important, never to be im-

portant. But all silently prayed for even the smallest upward surge in the life of Haywood.

One day in the dry autumn of 1961, Randy Jameson changed all that. He was too ambitious to keep himself bottled up in Haywood, especially since he was unhappy there. When Randy left, a dark veil fell over Haywood. It never recovered from the darkness. People poured out of Haywood, afraid to face its dingy past and its even dingier future. By 1963, Haywood was off the map of Kansas. By 1964, Haywood had ceased to exist.

I

One hundred yards behind the back door of Uncle Morris' house lay a faded red toolshed. Randy spent many hours of his early childhood playing there. He knew it inside out. Now it was designated to be Randy's gateway to freedom. It was also the root of the downfall of Haywood.

Randy clung frantically to one of the wooden rafters of the toolshed. His heart pounded heavily, but he held on with all his might. Sweat poured down his face and drenched the fabric of his knapsack, neatly balanced on the rafter and held in place by his head, which he pressed on the package of foodscraps and clothing as tightly as possible. He could not feel the pain of the gash a nail had ripped open upon his stomach or of the splinters which had pierced the skin on the inside part of his thighs. The first sign of temporary relief from panic in himself came when the sound of Uncle Morris' footsteps left the shed and the clank of chains on the door being locked was heard.

Randy twisted his head to the other side; the knapsack fell to the floor, and three slices of stale bread trickled out of the bag. He shifted both his hands to the top of the beam. When he swung his right leg cautiously over the rafter, he slipped. Randy now found himself hanging by his hands sooner than he had expected. He let go and fell carelessly beside his knapsack six feet down under his extended feet on the floor below. He groped for the knapsack crawling on his knees. He held his head upward gasping

to catch his breath. When his hands located the pack, he picked it up hurriedly. He fumbled over the shelves of tools and felt the familiar boards of the wooden window. He pounded it open and jumped out onto the barren dirt hill. Then he just ran.

And three slices of stale bread lay on the floor to grow moldy.

II

An hour's walk away was a room which was impounded deeply in Randy's thoughts. It was his bedroom. The bedroom set was a beautiful antique one; it had a solid oak frame and all sorts of knobs and domes and globes and spheres on top of each of the bedposts. Randy's parents had saved up for years so that they could afford this set. They always wanted Randy to have things even a sighted child could be glad of owning; Randy always wanted these things, too—even if he couldn't appreciate their beauty.

Blind people are handicapped only as long as they are not given the right and the chance to see. And Randy was blind but not handicapped.

Randy had been blind from birth. As time passed, he learned more and more of the prejudices against blind people, the way others condescended toward them. He learned to despise his own blindness and to despise these people. He had a goal in life: regardless of his own condition, Randy was going to achieve an equal status with sighted people. Then he would get his revenge and strike back at the people who had kept the blind handicapped for centuries.

But now his ill-destined dream was threatened. So yesterday the bedroom had been a center of meditation. Randy had thought in there for hours. He reviewed his own principles and took a course of action.

III

Grass-free hills had disappeared. Randy had entered a new terrain. It seemed as though the grass grew an inch with every step. The grass was now amber, three feet high, and very brittle. The long stems snapped and cracked with Randy's every movement. All was the very image of dryness.

It was not too far now. Somewhere at the end of this tawny jungle were the rail-

road tracks for which he was searching. Randy knew all railroad tracks must lead to some place of importance. If he could find them and follow them, he would be set loose forever. It was as perfect a runaway scheme as he could contrive in one day.

Randy was running away from home. It was the last resort, but the only solution Randy could come up with. How else was Randy to escape the parents who loved him so? They wanted him to be independent. So what were they doing? Sending him off to a school for blind children so he could learn how to work with a seeing eye dog. They wanted to take away his self-sufficiency, to kill his dream. In no way could Randy subjugate himself to such a life. He had to run away before tomorrow or off to school he would go. He had to run away forever.

And now the tracks lay just one hundred fifty yards away.

IV

Fierce pain had inched its way into the heart of every nerve in Randy's body. His stomach was cramped by hunger; it was so empty it hurt. His front side was a bloody mess. Scabs were forming and slowly adhering his stomach wound to his scarlet-stained T-shirt. Bending over tore away at the skin and dried blood, a result of his nail gash. Pink blotches enveloped each of the splinters on his legs. The continuous running and rapid spread of infection were wearing him out. Extreme fatigue was settling into the very marrow of his bones. Finally the physical strain could not be overcome. He grew dizzy and saw hallucinations. His knees buckled as he sank to the ground and fell asleep.

Randy's mind now ruled his body.

V

Randy's face lay expressionless, caressed by the grass. The soft, shiny, and totally useless eyelids glistened in the sunlight. The ruby lips were pressed together in restful serenity. The nose was a mass of freckles, lost in the color of the grass. And he had a wind-whipped mop of Raggedy Andy hair. And he had a knapsack in his hand.

Randy's dreams raced through his mind at a terrifying pace. They reflected the truth, the inner turmoil which separated his heart from his actions. During all the

running, he never really had time to realize how confused and unsure he was of himself. Sometimes a person knows how good life has been to him, but cannot accept what life offers him. It is then that the misery of the future divides a man's soul. The future is never certain and this lack of knowledge severs emotion from reason. This person is caught between the parting lands of an earthquake. The scent of freedom beckons him onward, but the beauty and love of the past always hold him back. As long as men have hearts, the leash will remain unbroken.

Randy was torn between his emotional ties and independence instinct. Now he found himself unsure of his own principles. Or at least unsure enough to question them.

His dreams brought together every living thought he possessed. They all led to his runaway, and his runaway led to these dreams. Only fate could control dreams.

Randy was in the center of the picture. But he was only the smallest point in a monstrous universe; it was even too large for him. And he saw the railroad tracks and all the thousands of old people who had tried to travel them before him strewn across it. They were all dead, and they were all happy. They had all lost life's battle. He knew their hearts had broken in two. They silently called him.

Randy had become increasingly embittered. None of these could be real. He had never seen any of these things in his life. He wasn't able to. He could not

have imagined what they looked like, and he was afraid. So he turned to his parents.

His parents just stared at him. Their hearts ran away from him, as Randy had run away from them.

A chasm split Randy's spirit. He was in panic. He leaped from side to side and did not know what to do. He cried harder. Madness seized him.

A high-pitched monotone shrill sounded faintly but clearly. It grew nearer. It came from the railroad tracks but was caused by no visible source. It shrieked on and on like a perpetual dial tone. Only after two minutes was it distinguishable as a train whistle.

VI

Randy awakened in the grass with a start. The whistle continued to steadily grow in volume. Randy uttered several bellows of fear and dashed toward the railroad tracks. He tore at the grass and his own scars in a crazed fury. The whistle rang louder and louder and echoed through all of Randy's mind. He ran and ran and ran. He could not stop; the whistle drew him forward. He ran more. He kept up in the same manner for another one hundred yards. Suddenly his right foot bumped into something. He tripped. Randy landed his bloody body on top of two long rails of cold hard steel. He felt the whistle of the train pass directly over him. And he never moved again.

Tomorrow the maggots will have a field day.



(dedicated to Soror Mea — SRL, and to mes amies)

i, myself, me

it wasn't long ago that i
thought the sunshine was
forever lost into rain;
and all my days were
cold, black and frightening —
i wanted out.

but then i found another
peak on which to live,
where i am taken for
what i am — not for
what i am wanted to be —
because i'm me.

people were telling me i
had to be psycho-analyzed
so i'd know where i was, but
i just became more lost
than i was when i —
first started out.

and hey, gl — don quixotes
can be real, 'cause i've met
some, drifters, not sure of
their calling, but they will be —
'cause they're not afraid to be different —
like me

and i've learned to smile,
amid the grief of people
bitching to one another,
over petty inadequacies,
but i'm out to please myself —
so i listen to me.

now i can laugh at the
elements, and peek out
from under that cloud, which
was repaired w/14K. gold,
and know that i'm right —
because i'm alive.

teardrops —
life's sorrows,
running dry . . .

— meg gallagher



Patience

A disturbed state of mind
Is one which is clouded in turmoil
Indecision is the rule.
Rationality blows its cool

One may wonder or question
Without much considerable hesitation
If a mind in such a murk
Will ever regain its ability to work

But a disturbed state of mind
Has the ability to clean its mess
As do the great multitude of the rest.
Give it time, itself it has to find.

Under those unusual circumstances
Be wary of accelerated advances.
And do not allow its confused state
To interfere with and determine fate.

But do treat its urgent requests
With a great deal of respect
Give it time —
Itself it has to find.

— James M. Mitchell, Jr.

Shattered Glass

I smiled and gazed out of my crystal box;
you know, everyone has one, these days.
You can look through to the other side,
but never touch it.
You try to look happy, for everyone has their own box.

I try to crack the glass,
try to break away,
All I'm asking for is some fresh air.
I try to crack your glass, but all you do is —

Smile at one another, we all are so content.
But God, I know I made my box,
So really, I have nothing to say,
But God, since I'm stuck behind my wall,
Can I have a one-way mirror looking out?
So that all people who look at me can see themselves.
Maybe once if they could see how locked in they really are
They'd —

CRACK!

— Joe Fiore

Endless Pianist

play on on on
for naught but your selves
indulge
your fingers caress: an act
not mine to watch but do
and don't
I wish I could and
so on on on
you play I hate
you but when you're through and gone
God don't I wish you were back

— Steve Messina

Away in New Jersey

anticipation
I await my love
torments of Tantalus
dealt out from above

reminiscence
the moments enjoyed
emptiness
without her I'm void

— efccc
2/19/74

INCUBATOR

William Shea

Antistrophe

A tepid Christmas, Kohoutek shone above the harbor, la cite celeste, skyscrapers of flames: jasper, jacinth, topaz, emerald, amethyst, chalcedony, chrysolite, chrysoprasus, beryl, sapphire, sardius, sardonyx. But in the moonless nights the beacon lost its way, began to creep a fall, dribbled red inexorably to a fate of blackenedblue splashdown. A new sea. And so on the empty dock she who once possessed the attention of a child now had the concentration of a master, watching. An afternoon, an evening.

Finally she turned her asterbrownkometes, shimmering, veiled, to the dullness-exhausted boy beside her: "Do you want to go now?"

He moved his eyes from the comet, whose flare remained to speckle his perspective, blindsquinting, "Yeah, sure . . . but where? The night is young." Leer. Courtesy Groucho Marx, circa "Lip Service" or something. Read this morning that Groucho Marx is a bitter insecure man. Another myth exploded by Walter Scott's Personality Parade. But does she understand that plagiarized leer? Hohe, vraiment. "Oh, I know. The Globe?"

"Will's new play. All right." Brown touched blue, hair over eyes, awayed by wind.

As the boy pulled himself up, a task, he groaned wearily, "The theater is my passion." Oh hell.

An autumnblistered waterfront street down which rats ran to drown themselves: buildings were born, rampant, from their graves, totteringtoddled towards town. Sweeping, the wind was a rain of air, forming puddles which floated the wrack of streets, blossomed the contrary waves of the creak and slam of the door of a ruined van, graffiti-attacked, CANCER RULES. Foolish fad. Tchaikovsky's bassoon sobbed somewhere along the darkness. Romanticism. Where is the theme? Lost in variations. Oh, there . . . The source, fireglow, the light of a-man, one would think, although his cigarette

hung almost unsupported by his thin long shaking hand, like the smock which fell limp upon his skimpiness, like himself which suspended over the street, was all that brightened this lane, calling, it seemed, for an ignorance of the stars, this light, only this light . . . Queer son-ofabitch!

"Finally give up on that heavenly spectacle?" the boy said, flashing a rude and sarcastic corner of his eye.

"Really, I don't understand why they don't want to look at it anymore just because they found out that it's only a slow-moving meteor. It's still beautiful, I mean, though it's kind of sad."

"You sound like you feel sorry for it."

"Well, I do, in a way . . . But why are you laughing at me? I always thought you were interested in astronomy, science."

He looked quickly at her slowforwarding legs, swaddled in light denim. "I have my reasons," he said, then closed his eyes, against the rising wind, against a wet sigh from within.

Then, like a scop riding home from a battle, he struck the harp of "God I've got to tell you about this teacher I've got, Mr. Faiminfortran. Really weird sonofabitch. A sample conversation: 'How does this Latin go now, boys?' — laboribus, consiliis, periculis meis, e flamma atque ferro, ac paene ex faucibus ereptam et vobis conservatam ac restitutam videtis. I'll pass out the answer keys as soon as I get them. How's the Demolition Derby team doing? You know, I teach Sunday School and I tell the kids you really ought to read "Decline of the West" by Oswald Spengler. Last year you studied Caesar. The thought of that great general suggested an examination of the stuff of which leaders are made. The master idea of your study was leadership; and for the ideal leader you chose Christ. In Him leadership took on flesh and blood, became incarnate before your eyes. This year Cicero is your author. The master idea is conflict: conflict in the realm of government, of law, of religion; and the

key word of the clash is Rome. For tomorrow, do Chap. XXI, lines 19-20. Finish that up. Did I tell you how we almost beat St. John of the Apocalypse yesterday? I had cut a kid from the team for missing a game. He said he had to take care of his little brother. Flimsy excuse. As a Catholic, I'm against abortion. It's attitude, that's what counts. How's the Cliff-Diving Team doing? Today I was reading another book in class, he runs at me, tears it out of my hands, screaming about respect or something."

"What was the book?"

"A Greek reader. I had to learn some words for a test." In vain. Asebia ase-lenos asthenia

"Oh well, I suppose he thinks he has to stick up for his course. He may have" asitos askos "Yeah, but" he whined, breaking.

She continued "been ridiculous about it, but he's a teacher, you've got to understand."

astakti. Understand all right. Hysteria. Nothing to get hysterical about, nothing to life, God's a dream for fools . . . What am I thinking about? these people like him. So tired. This broad walking along, blueeyedbabywahwahwooh, head in the clouds, light on her feet, what is it, all smiles, don't understand. All garbage. He smirked slightly. Except her maybe. Pah. No damn God. No sense.

A woman stood on a corner where lights began to grow, dry heat of windowshine along the street. She was a fixture. Could hang a sign on her. GENERAL CASSANDRA FLOOD/WORLD'S OLDEST WOMAN/MONUMENT ERECTED BY THE CITY 106 B.C./ALL PIGEONS WILL BE SHOT. If my mother saw this. Blue dust in her veins, fresh blood on her lips, slabby weapons carefully hinted, black vacant eyes a wail audible to all us dogs. My poem. How does it go now?

*Critics condemn her,
Hypocrites who spurn the material
Of the planet earth's most magnificent
masterpiece,
But I think she captures the Zeitgeist well,
Allezzeitgeist.*

The lines automatedly marched in his approving mind. Not bad. Social relevance, statement. The Register. Tradition of George Santayana. With trotting pressure he moved his companion slightly to



the side of the street opposite the prostitute, protection. Not at her nor at the boy did she look, but ahead.

They came to the heart of the business district. Fat judges of storefronts sat. Alice's bottles: Buy me! Past garish rows of fashion, Prince Machabelli, Dicker and Dicker of Beverly Hills, they stopped, regarded a television in one window

— the end of a station editorial: ". . . so let's get these drunk drivers off the road before they kill us all!"/CHANNEL 5 WILL BROADCAST RESPONSIBLE OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

— a preview of the Rose Bowl Parade: "This year's Parade Theme is 'America: Our Mother Country.' Who will win the Governor's Trophy?"

— a commercial for the most revolutionary home appliance of the century, the Vegematic, which slices dices hacks chops cuts to ribbons purees. . .

Soft laughter she sang, and they walked again.

As they were approaching the Globe from across the trafficladen street they saw facing them an old woman in nurse's clothes. She tugged a heavy dime grocery bag. Her nameplate glinted as they passed: Miss Beatrice Porter. The turned-

down sailor's cap. Like that helpwoman in the rectory, asked me to run across the traintracks for some bottles she might cash. Insane. A story she stood, Hwae-tautha: once she smiled incessantly, but then a frown freed itself, was frozen there, and although her eyes attempted to kindly flicker, she succeeded only in a batty blink. In her wrinkles curses for the many patients against whose beds she often smashed her arthritic toes took shelter. I like to think of them as my children. She was free now; perhaps to die, but not in hospital.

The Globe was once a chapel, now a playhouse for an experimental acting troupe and occasionally a concert hall. But the last concert held there was many months ago, although a poster advertised it yet: EDGAR WINTER WITH SPECIAL GUEST VIRGIL FOX. Oh, that must have been supah. Fox, Bach through a meat grinder, blabbering blubber, Hi! I'm Virgil Fox. I play the King of Instruments! Just like Hah! Ah'm Glen Campbell, disgusting. I will now play my brilliant adaption of Ginastera's masterpiece Toccata. The word toccata means to touch, so if you feel like touching the person next to you — and so rushes all the rest of the damn innuendo, organs, gutsy Bach. Bouncing round on his fat ass, sweaty fat fingers holding down triads, glossing octaves in feedback fuzz with single weighty thumbs, all stops out. Go Fox! the angel-dusting kid, really waiting for Edgar, greasy hand floating around in the fog at blackeyed haltered girls, unappreciative sluttglances. Then the albino scarecrow Edgar with the synthesizer around his neck, shouts of Frankenstein!, holds up the defunct peacesign, thin fingers spread wideapart in a spastic V, waiting for response. A great show, surely. Grotesque.

A newer but tearswaving poster announced the current play:

THE LIVING THEATER PRESENTS
"ALL ROTS THAT'S BORN DEAD"
A COMITRAGEDY BY
WILBUR DICK NESBIT
(New York Drama Critics' Circle
Prizewinning Author of
"You Can't Take it With You")

"Wilbur Dick Nesbit? This isn't the Will I had in mind," she said wondering quietly.

"Oh, it's probably just one of his jokes,

the plays on his name in the sonnets, like that." Wilbur Dick Nesbit? The Living Theater. The Limping Theater. Julian Beck. I want to appeal to these people, this generation, the youth of today, because they are so aware. And that woman. We are developing as a community. Our focus. But they're not bad. That thing about political sadomasochism. Sum life up in a word: sex. Probably right.

They passed by a third poster which boasted 20 DEGREES COOLER INSIDE. They never take anything down here. Winter, the stupid sonsofbitches. Entering the boy looked back across the street, saw long queues waiting to see "The Exorcist." Usual Saturday night crowd, hiho. But here was an empty theater. Neither tickettaker nor usher, only a box for donations. The boy drew all his change from a pocket, a quarter, a penny; glancing last at the brownshining sto^a, E PLURIBUS UNUM, he deposited them.

Ah, what decor. Could use a woman's touch around here, boys. Seats were fumbled for, felt, found. A blast of white glare, an explosion of recorded traffic sound, the play began: on a fruitstand leaned Hzero, dressed in cleats, a loincloth, a shirt designed with camels and a space helmet, one foot on the prostrate fruit vendor's neck. A woman, Pandera, intended to be a cross between a Playmate-of-the-Month and a statue of the Holy Mother, breastless whiteplaster curves, ran around Hzero, and was continually struck by applecores which he spat but nevertheless kept on, crying "O Hzero, why do you hurt me so? O Hzero, why do you hurt me so? O Hzero, why" Monsieur F. Artiste, in beret and white robe symbolizing good, stood by this scene, occasionally jumping with effete lechery at Pandera, who, being composed of slickpaper, collapsed and was recycled.

Whisper: "I'm going for some popcorn. Want some?"

Oh for christ's sake. "There's no popcorn here. It's a high-class joint, sister."

"I'll find some."

Pah. Popcorn for christ's sake. The play went on. It grew very warm in the theater: the sign had lied. Purgatory in here.

M. F. Artiste had joined a chorus of angels, strewing roses. They prayed, re-

citing what the playwright, a generous distant relative, had given them to say:

In a dream I stood today
Upon a headland — beyond the world
I held a pair of scales and
Weighed the world
This is the only peace for me
The mire after the struggle.
I am exhausted. I am no longer
Able to push weary arms wildly
Through the muddy quicksand.
I am going to collapse.

The scenes formed a cycle, quick and painfully repeated. Not really a bad play. Effect is good. Modes of imitation. Where is she? Organ music began, an interpolation. Suddenly slickpaper Pandera, on whose back the script was printed, exploded into fire. M. F. Artiste succeeded in capturing her at last, exulted holding ashes. He stood, a Ku Klux Klan patch now on his pure robe. The chorus' roses were pollinated by mcmkilling bees. All ran into the aisles, genuflecting and chanting for Winter and Virgil. They appeared, began a dissonant duet. Vertigo took hold of the boy. The actors had multiplied to dozens, performed the play, chanted, ran at him, stating "Sign of piece! Sign of piece!" His thoughts were daftdashed about him, reeling with the rhythms of hate and supplication. M. F. Artiste came to the fore, bearing his masterpiece, a reconstruction of Pandera. Mrs. Wilma Dick Nesbit, in robes of red and white, disfigured, bleeding. She came towards him, deathrattled.

"Sign of piece! Sign of piece!"

"Now you've learned to do it, well let's make a chain now . . ."

He rose, tripped through the buoyless lightanddark, was stabbed by benchsplinters, like outstretched fingers

"Sign of piece! Sign of —"

"Now that we have completed this offering, let us ponder the significance of our sacrifice of the body and blood of the son to the father." Curses echoed down the aisle.

What is this? I — where is she? Must find her. Can't have left. Madness, can't be happening, nothing like this.

He was running from nothing now, slowed so as not to stumble. The blue of starry night flashed before him. There she is. Her cheeks flushed with breeze-

blown bloodwarmth. He jumped from the stairs, collapsed, struck pavement. Dead.

Strophe

. . . Loxias wha Wulf our fate is forked song never begun what oh weird word ahhh . . .

From oncegrassy ground, sickened to a supple stone by an unseasonable season of sleet and sludge, a trap for home-eager birds, with sleepgiven strength he quickly rose. He walked a little, stretched. His head was clear, though throbbing. Nightmare, wha? Crazy. He regarded the emptied bottles which lay a few steps away. New Year's wine. Old wine in new bottles. Ships in bottles. Eh . . . no frigate like a book. I too have written some good books. Oh . . . who said that? Mad Nietzsche towards the end. Nichi nichi kore ko nichi. Cold brought him fully awake, ended the last stray sleep-spittle sensings of his mind. He realized.

Strange dream, insane. But Eileen? Somewhere tonight, somebody's party. How many expect to make her, waiting for the tip of the hand, slip, the coy gesture. Body English. Oh, the disappointment, boys, she won't, no . . . Aah. You fool, damned altar boy. Well. No matter. Jungfrau rein im schonsten Sinne. Expect to sunder her, bulls in a china shop. Still. Cela ne fait rien. Remember Eddie Speckman once waiting outside her house, he had suddenly become gagaga about her for some reason for other, but when she came out, suddenly Aw sh'aint that good. What did he expect? Idea of her breasts magnified to blot out the sky, idiot! Of course, that's his way. But you expect miracles? Chesty Morgan or some gargoyle like that? Good Lord, what's there is enough, more so. Then calmed.

As he paced gently, the-children-are-asleepwise, through the schoolyard, Mahler set into his mind, was welcome. Nice movement. The Third. Schleppend, er, no — scieppend, what? Oh, yes. Langsam. Ruhevoll. Empfunden. Mind's dance of a little German, stored away as it passed, reminded him of the language which he studied, and Greek words were remembered, invoked, pronounced slowly to self. Asmenos, aspaxomai, askeo, asteios, astrape.

Ridiculous what they expect anyway, from anyone, anything, something's got

to be more than the sum of its parts, you could say, but they don't even appreciate the parts themselves. I fell down an elevator shaft once. Is that like falling in love? Sob saga. Ask a stupid question. Sister wondered why Dylan said nothing except Hi, how are you. Gregarious. Leap on stage like some slapstick clown, Heh, I'm Bob Dylan, you remember me. Been a long time since ah been in Boston, just about near meh near-fatal motorcycle accident. Been hearing a lot about this Park Plaza thing you people here got, sounds like a real good deal. Talk shop. How's your uncle Harold? Um. Madge and the kids? Got a message for y'all. Sure.

See her tomorrow, perhaps. How was your New Year's Eve. Oh, fine. You were with me in spirit, my dear, anyway, made it brighter. Ha. I won't say that, I know. Not lionhearted. Oh, well. In spirit. Wonder that dream might have meant my guilt, talking about myself to her. But she always asks. Try to change the subject. Riddling sphinx? No. Her questions. Well, she thinks about me. Nice of her.

He stood to cross a street, waiting for a drunken driver to flash by. Tonight thou art mine, who am orphaned. Go now.

Audible the crack of riverice, treacherous though thicklayered, sluggish, splitting shards dissolving, disappearing. Flakes fell, snow blued by moonglow, whiteblue reflections of night to salve the windburnt earth, from the eudia.



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